

Ergonomic Keyboards

A word of warning: don't pay more for something that is labelled as "ergonomic" without checking whether there really is any extra benefit to it.

Currently, keyboard design isn't too varied but this is likely to change in the future. Most keyboards still have the QWERTY layout, are fairly flat and sit on the desk. There are a few keyboards that break away from these norms but they do not seem to have gained much popularity.

Here are a few guidelines to follow when looking for an ergonomic keyboard:

- Firstly, identify what's wrong with your current keyboard. This will help you look for improvements in your new one.
- Try it before you buy it. How do the keys feel? What is the resistance to depression when keying? Do they spring back into place without affecting your movement? Do the keys feel solid or flimsy?
- If you plan to invest in a contoured keyboard or an angled/split keyboard be prepared to give it time to get used to it. They do have the benefit of reducing the amount of deviation at the wrists - individuals with a larger stature often find them especially beneficial for this reason.
- If you do number inputting alone for significant periods of time then a split keyboard may be beneficial as you can place it in a position that allows optimal posture. Conversely, if you seldom use the number pad it may be beneficial to invest in a "laptop" keyboard without the number pad - this allows the keyboard to be positioned centrally and makes the angle of deviation equal and symmetrical at the wrists.
- Remember there are alternatives to the keyboard for data input such as voice recognition software (VRS). VRS has become a practical and easy-to-use alternative in recent years. Other advances such as touch screen input are also slowly making their way onto the market.
- Finally, an "ergonomic keyboard" is not necessarily the best way to reduce musculoskeletal loading - correct furniture and equipment arrangement, good typing technique, good posture and good work routines are probably the most effective means of tackling the physical demands of computer use.

If you need to change your keyboard because of a musculoskeletal problem or need advice because of a disability that makes use of a normal keyboard difficult, then it is worth getting the advice of a qualified person such as an occupational physiotherapist or ergonomist. They are likely to have good knowledge of what's available as well as being able to advise on what's best for you as an individual.